Determining the Need for Internet Monitoring of Sex Offenders

Stephen Brake, Ph.D., and Jim Tanner, Ph.D.

Several factors should be considered in deciding how to monitor internet and contact sex offenders.

Krone (2004) has developed a typology describing 9 categories of offenders which differ according to the degree to which they actively seek pornography, obtain the material secretly, groom a child on line for sex, and produce child pornography.

Other factors may also be important. For example, one may wish to consider measures of sexual deviancy such as the presence or absence of deviant sexual interests in children as identified by an objective measure (penile plethysmography or viewing time measures like the Abel Assessment for Sexual Interests). Sexual deviance can also be assessed by examining the offender's history of sexual boundary crossing behaviors – that is, how many different types of paraphilias are exhibited by the offender and how frequently he engages in them.

In addition, factors that predict general antisocial acting out behavior may also be important. These factors include such things as the offender's age and marital status, the severity and nature of his overall criminal offending, whether he possesses antisocial personality traits, whether he is likely to be a substance abuser or emotionally unstable, and whether he has poor social supports. Instruments commonly used to estimate risk among adult sex offenders include such factors and may be useful (although it should be noted that such instruments are validated primarily on contact sex offenders). These instruments include the RRASOR (Hanson, 1997), MnSOST-R (Epperson, Kaul, Huot, Hesselton, Alexander, and Goldman, 1999), and the combination of the STATIC-99 or STATIC-2002 (Hanson and Thornton, 2003; Harris, Phenix, Hanson, and Thornton, 2003) and the STABLE/ACUTE (Hanson and Harris, 2001; Harris and Hanson, 2003).

In an attempt to guide decisions about how to monitor an offender's use of the internet, we devised a two factor risk grid which incorporates both the offender's history of internet behavior and his overall risk for sexual acting out. It is suggested that the factors interact to determine the level internet monitoring an offender might need. Although not specifically stated, it would be reasonable to suggest that lower risk offenders require little internet monitoring while moderate risk offenders require "passive" monitoring. Passive monitoring can be accomplished through random system examinations using tools like Field Search or on-going monitoring with system resident applications like Spector®, E-Blaster®, or CyberSentinel®. Higher risk offenders may require "active" monitoring with forced gateway applications like CSWeb® or ImpulseControl®.

The level and type of monitoring is perhaps less important than making the decision to monitor. Offenders rated as "Moderate" or higher in the grid should have their computer activity monitored. The particular type of monitoring employed may be driven by risk but also by technical issues, accessibility, and case-specific elements.

DETERMINING NEED FOR INTERNET MONITORING:
INTERNET BEHAVIOR AND RISK FOR CONTACT OFFENSES

Need For Computer Monitoring While Under Supervision

B						
B	**VERY-HIGH**	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
e	**HIGH**	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
h	**MOD-HIGH**	MOD/HIGH	MOD/HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
a	**MODERATE**	MODERATE	MODERATE	MOD/HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
v	**LOW-MOD**	LOW/MOD	LOW/MOD	MODERATE	MOD/HIGH	HIGH
i	**LOW**	LOW	LOW	LOW/MOD	MODERATE	MOD/HIGH
o						
r		**LOW**	**LOW/MOD**	**MODERATE**	**MOD/HIGH**	**HIGH**

Risk of Contact Offense

Y-Axis – "Behavior"

Historical Internet Styles Related to Child Pornographic Images

LOW: Reactive type of user: Incidental use, downloads small amounts of pornography when prompted, OR, less than 1 hour per month spent viewing pornography.

LOW-MODERATE: Active user of pornography: Actively seeks images via web pages, OR, more than 1 hour per month but less than 10 hours a month spent viewing pornography.

MODERATE: Collector behavior: Actively seeks pornography through file sharing or catalogues material, OR, more than 10 hours a month but less than 30 hours a month viewing pornography.

MODERATE-HIGH: Engager behavior: Solicits or grooms children on-line.

HIGH: Abuser behavior: Engages in sex with child met on-line, OR, more than 30 hours per month viewing pornography.

VERY HIGH: Promoter of commercial behavior: Produces or distributes child pornography.

X-Axis – "Risk of Contact Offense"

Risk for Contact Offense Derived from Risk Assessment Instruments
(e.g. RRASOR, MnSOST-R, STATIC/STABLE/ACUTE)

LOW
LOW/MODERATE
MODERATE
MODERATE/HIGH
HIGH

References

Epperson, D.L., Kaul, J.D., Hout, S.J., Hesselton, D., Alexander, W., and Goldman, R. (1999). Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool – Revised (MnSOST-R): Development, performance, and recommended risk level cut scores. Retrieved from www.psychology.iastate.edu/~dle/TechUpdatePaper12-03.pdf.

Hanson, R.K. (1997). The development of a brief actuarial risk scale for sexual offense recidivism. Ottawa, Ontario: Department of the Solicitor General of Canada. Retrieved from www.sgc.gc.ca.

Hanson, R.K. and Harris, A. (2001). A structured approach to evaluating change among sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, *13* (2), 105-122.

Hanson, R.K. and Thornton, D. (2003). Notes on the development of the Static 2002. Report # 2003-01. Ottawa, Canada: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

Harris, A. and Hanson, R.K. (2003). The Dynamic Supervision Project: Improving community supervision of sex offenders. *Corrections Today*, August, 60-64.

Harris, A., Phenix, A., Hanson, R.K., and Thornton, D. Static-99 coding rules revised: 2003. Ottawa, Canada: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. Retrieved from www.sgc.gc.ca.

Krone, T. (2004). A typology of online child pornography offending. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 279. Also available at http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi279.pdf.